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U.S. ARRESTS NINE DEFENDANTS IN ALLEGED HEROIN-DISTRIBUTION RING

CHICAGO – Two weeks ago, after FBI agents seized approximately a kilogram of heroin from a drug courier's impounded car without arresting the man to protect their ongoing investigation, **George A. Prado**, the alleged leader of the Chicago distribution cell of a Colombian heroin-trafficking organization, in an intercepted telephone conversation with one his suppliers, threatened to kidnap, beat and possibly murder the courier. Prado is one of nine defendants who were arrested today on federal drug charges for conspiracy to distribute kilogram quantities of heroin in Chicago. The defendants include alleged suppliers, distributors, couriers, and wholesale customers of the Chicago-based distribution network of a Colombian organization.

Eight defendants were arrested this morning in Chicago and one in New York. Search warrants executed at five locations in and around Chicago yielded approximately ¼-kilogram of suspected heroin, 16 kilograms of suspected cocaine, a gun and \$50,000 cash. The charges stem from an investigation that the FBI in Chicago began in February and included several seizures totaling approximately 1 1/3-kilograms of heroin before today, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

Mr. Fitzgerald announced the charges with Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Richard W. Sanders, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Drug Enforcement Administration; Byram Tichenor, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division in Chicago, Philip J. Cline, Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department, and the Illinois State Police. The investigation is continuing, they said.

The investigation centered around the alleged heroin-trafficking activities of Prado, a hoisting engineer for the Water Management Department and the alleged head of a Chicago cell that received shipments of heroin on consignment from the Colombian organization. The charges allege that Prado, his brother-in-law, **Anthony C. Ritacco**, and **Michael D. Hart**, both also low-level Water Management employees who were arrested today, together with a fourth individual identified in the complaints as a cooperating witness who had “mutual employment” with Prado and has not been charged, engaged in the conspiracy during normal weekday working hours.

A series of four federal criminal complaints that were unsealed following the arrests charge all nine defendants with conspiracy to distribute heroin. In addition to Prado, 47, of 5856 S. Nordica, Chicago, other defendants and their alleged roles are as follows:

Organizers/Leaders:

Sandra Stewart, 31, of 213 May St., Bensenville, also known as “Sandra Rangel” and “Guera,” who delivered narcotics to Nora Rivas and Alexander Millan and retrieved narcotics proceeds from them;

Alexander Millan, 42, of Jackson Heights, N.Y., aka “Alexander Millan Zapata” and “Alexillo,” a high-level member of the Colombian organization who is responsible for supervising the supply of kilogram quantities of heroin to Chicago;

Nora Rivas, 36, of 5315 North Damen Ave., Chicago, aka “Nora E. Rivas,” “Nora Elena Leon,” and “Flaca,” who managed the Colombian organization’s supply of narcotics in Chicago and handled the collection of drug proceeds. Rivas works at a currency transmitter business called La Tienda Express or La Kayana Express, located at 1625 W. Montrose, Chicago;

Distributors/Wholesale Customers:

_____ **Javier Hernandez**, 40, of 1439 S. 59th Ave., Cicero, aka “Harvey,” a heroin distributor/wholesale customer of the Chicago cell run by Prado;

Michael D. Hart, 39, of 1651 N. Long, Chicago, aka “Dada,” a laborer in Water Management Department;

Couriers:

_____ **Vito J. Renteria**, 43, of Chicago, a courier for Prado responsible for exchanging narcotics and proceeds between the suppliers and Prado’s wholesale customers and distributors;

Joseph R. Cortez, 48, of Chicago, aka “Joey,” also a courier for Prado responsible for exchanging narcotics and proceeds between the suppliers and Prado’s wholesale customers and distributors;

Customers:

_____ **Anothony C. Ritacco**, 45, of 5414 S. Sayre St., Chicago, aka “Tone,” a cement mixer for the Water Management Department and one of Prado’s customers; and

Individual A, (also referred to as **CW2**), a Water Management Department employee and a drug customer of Prado’s, who received approximately 100 grams of heroin from Prado’s courier, Renteria, on March 10.

Millan was arrested early today in New York, where he will appear in court. The remaining eight defendants arrested in Chicago will appear at 2:00 p.m. before Magistrate Judge Nan Nolan in U.S. District Court in Chicago.

According to the complaint affidavits, Prado is a high-level distributor of heroin who was supplied by Rivas and Millan. Prado communicated with his narcotics suppliers by telephone and

in person to coordinate deliveries of heroin, as well as drug proceeds. Prado also received deliveries of heroin on credit from his suppliers, then distributed or attempted to distribute this heroin to dealers to whom he sells the heroin, specifically, Hernandez, Ritacco and Hart. These dealers generally purchased 100 gram quantities of heroin from Prado to sell in the Chicago market. Renteria is a courier who handled the exchange of narcotics from Millan and Rivas directly to Prado's distributors/wholesale customers. Cortez is a second courier who handled the exchange of narcotics from Millan and Rivas directly to Prado's distributors/wholesale customers.

The investigation began when an FBI cooperating witness (CW1) told agents about a heroin-trafficking ring involving Individual A, and others. On March 10, approximately 100 grams of heroin was seized when Individual A attempted to sell it to CW1 outside a facility where Individual A worked, according to the complaints. The heroin allegedly was delivered to Individual A by Renteria for Prado. Individual A (now CW2) then began cooperating with the investigation and delivered to Prado \$8,300 that was purported to be proceeds from the sale to CW1.

The charges allege that on May 24, after Prado had obtained a kilogram of heroin from Millan at Prado's direction, the Illinois State Police stopped Renteria, who did not have a valid driver's license, and towed his car, resulting in the heroin being seized by the FBI. Renteria later tried to explain losing the heroin to Prado but Prado did not believe him, the affidavits state. Prado then allegedly called Millan and another co-defendant to discuss kidnaping, beating and possibly killing Renteria, saying to Millan if he wasn't satisfied with Renteria's answers, "they will get the knives out and they will [expletive] him up and that will be real fast." Renteria was taken into custody by the FBI a short time later.

On June 6, Millan, Rivas, Prado, Hart and Cortez allegedly conspired to deliver 500 grams of heroin. After Cortez allegedly delivered half the heroin to Hart, FBI agents observed Cortez as he allegedly placed the remaining half in a self-storage locker at 7131 W. 60th St., Chicago. A search of that locker today yielded a approximately 1/4-kilogram of suspected heroin, officials said. Other searches were executed today at Prado's residence, Rivas' residence, Stewart's residence and a residence where Hernandez was staying and at which the cocaine, gun and cash were recovered.

The government is being represented by Assistant United States Attorney Michael Z. Gurland.

If convicted, each defendant faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment without parole and a maximum fine of \$4 million. Note, however, that the Court would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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